

(12) UK Patent Application (19) GB (11) 2 100 905 A

(21) Application No 8119622
(22) Date of filing 25 Jun 1981
(43) Application published
8 Jan 1983

(51) INT CL.⁷
G07F 17/34

(52) Domestic classification
G4V 118 AA
U1S 1174 G4V

(56) Documents cited
GB 1528507
GBA 2068819
GBA 2067807

(58) Field of search
G4V

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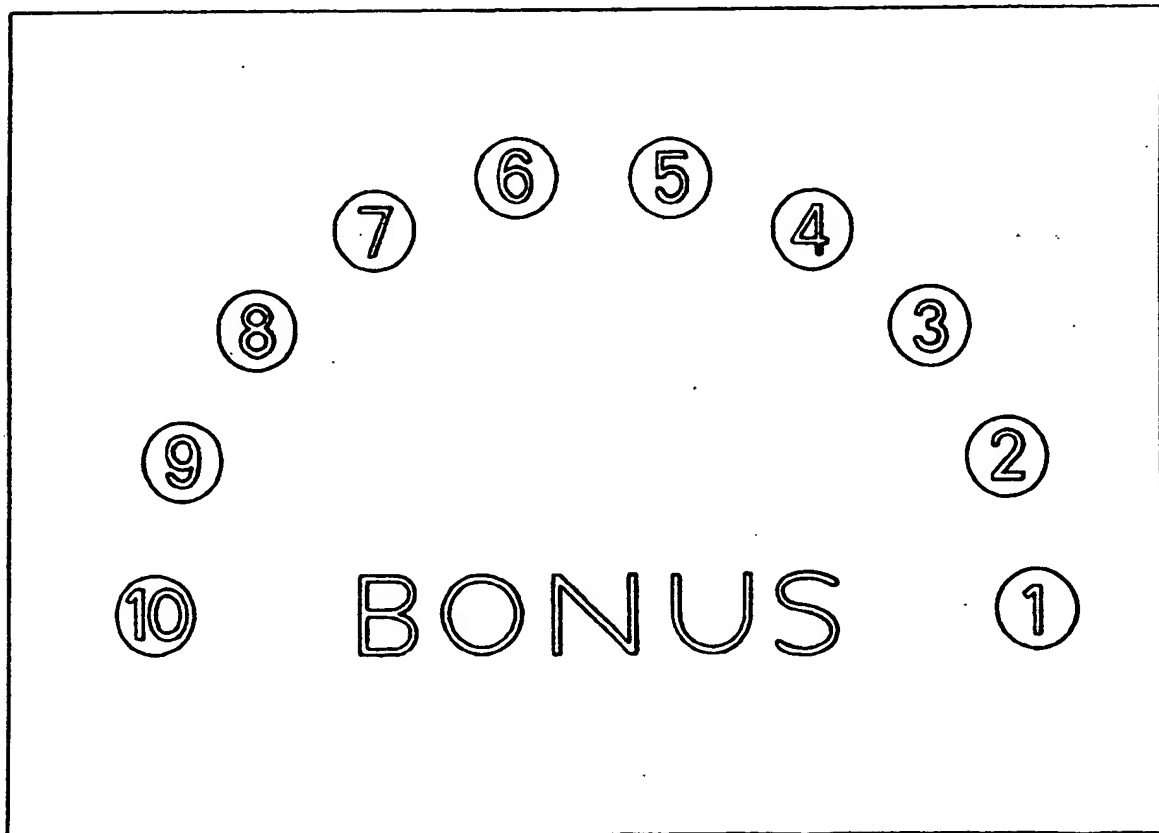
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(54) Coin-operated gaming or
amusement machines

(57) A fruit machine offers a nudge
feature and another feature which can
be available simultaneously and by
which the reels can be moved through
several symbol positions. Thus the
reels can have a coarse adjustment
followed by a fine one (through the
nudge feature) to achieve a winning
combination. Both features may offer
choice of direction, and the amount of
adjustment available may be
determined by the reel positions at the
end of the associated reel spin.

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SPECIFICATION

Improvements relating to coin-operated gaming or amusement machines

This invention relates to coin-operated or coin-freed gaming or amusement-with-prizes machines, and the term "coin" is intended in this Specification to embrace tokens which can be obtained from the proprietor of the machine in exchange for normal money.

This invention is concerned with machines of the kind known as fruit machines in which a series of symbols carried by rotatable drums, reels, discs or their equivalents, is displayed to view in a line. For convenience, reference will henceforth simply be made to reels. When the machine is operated by insertion of a coin, and possibly also by depression of a lever or pressing of a button or the like, the reels rotate and stop in an apparently random manner, and if the symbols in the resulting line are in a winning combination, a payout mechanism is operated and a prize is awarded and indicated.

In order to add to the interest of such machines, it is common to add an extra 'feature' by which there is occasionally the chance of a prize being awarded for some occurrence beyond the simple arrival of the reels, after their initial spin, at a particular combination line. It has been proposed to enable the player to adjust the position of the reels by indexing them forwards (or backwards) by what has become known as a 'nudge' button. Normally, the player can see the symbol in the position adjacent the combination line and can thus predict the result of the nudge adjustment. If this brings up a winning combination line, then a prize is awarded. With another feature, referred to herein as a 'shuffle', the reels are moved randomly backwards and forwards before stopping again.

It is the aim of this invention to introduce some further variety and excitement into this adjustment of the drums.

According to the present invention there is provided a fruit machine of the kind described having an indicator, wherein the reels are marked with extra symbols, the occurrence of any such extra symbols on the combination line after a normal play resulting in a corresponding indication on the indicator, and wherein, when such indication is in a qualifying zone, there is made available another feature enabling reel adjustments by the player.

There may be more than one such further feature, and preferably those known as "nudging" and "shuffling" may be available.

Conveniently, the extra symbols are numbers, and these may be superimposed on the normal fruit machine symbols. When a number does occur, a corresponding number of lights may be lit on the indicator, which may be in the form of a panel. Some of these lights may have no effect, but when those in the qualifying zone are lit the extra features are available. Thus a high number might have to be achieved before the player has an extra chance of a win. The higher the number,

the more opportunities he may be given, for preferably there is a subtraction for each time the feature is used.

There may also be provided a gamble feature whereby, if there is an indication in the qualifying zone, the player may attempt to increase the number of times he can use the extra feature.

For a better understanding of the invention one embodiment will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawing in which the single Figure is a diagram of a fruit machine panel.

It will be understood that, for the various operations to be described, there will be buttons or other manually operated switch devices by which the player can select a preferred feature and trigger appropriate action by the machine. The machine itself will preferably be electronically controlled and the means for achieving the various types of play are well within the compass of a design engineer and will not be described in detail.

The panel has a key word BONUS whose letters are translucent and can be individually illuminated by respective lights behind panel. Other words could be chosen, not necessarily of five letters.

There is an arcuate arrangement of spots over this key word, numbered 1 to 10. These also can be individually illuminated. Again, their number is not critical, neither is their physical arrangement or shape.

The reels of the fruit machine have the usual symbols which show in an array of windows. In addition, certain symbols have a number superimposed. For example, that number might be 8. When the reels have been spun and such a number appears on the combination or win line, the panel lights are activated to progress through the word BONUS and then through the numbered spots. If the number was 8, the five letters of BONUS would be illuminated in succession, followed by spots 1, 2, and 3. The letters and spots may stay illuminated, or be extinguished when the next one is lit. The final illuminated spot may be arranged to flash rather than give a steady light.

When a number spot is so illuminated, the player is offered a choice. He may for example "shuffle" one or more reels. That is, by pressing the appropriate button or buttons, the reels are made to index in one direction and then the other, and perhaps even back again, a random number of steps and times. They stop showing different symbols (usually) on the win line, and this can be a winning combination. Having pressed the shuffle button, the highest value illuminated spot is extinguished, but the next lower one stays lit in its place. If the shuffle does not result in a win, and if there is still an illuminated number spot, the exercise can be repeated until there are no illuminated number spots left.

As an alternative, the player may "nudge" the reels rather than shuffle. That is, he can press a button and index a reel backwards or forwards, one symbol position at a time. For each step, the illuminated spots are reduced by one. Thus if spot

3 were illuminated, the player could have three "nudges". He could instead have one shuffle followed by two nudges, two shuffles followed by one nudge, or three shuffles. However, it is not intended to allow a nudge to be followed by a shuffle. Any win concludes the game and all the lights are extinguished.

A game feature may also be provided. If this is activated when one of the number spots is illuminated the player can press a gamble button and perhaps increase his available "shuffles" or "nudges." Usually a successful gamble will double them. However, if unsuccessful, all will be lost. This gamble feature will not be available after any nudging or shuffling; it will have to be played before any other feature is used.

Not all the superimposed numbers will be sufficient to reach the illuminated spots. However, there may be a random facility for holding those letters of the key word BONUS that are illuminated over to the succeeding play or plays and if another number comes up it can be added on, perhaps illuminating some of the number spots. For example, if number 3 came up on one game, BONUS would be illuminated. If the reel with that number can then be held by an associated hold button, pressing it will retain the reel in that position and keep BONUS illuminated. If number 4 came up on another reel in the succeeding spin, number spot 2 would be illuminated and "shuffle" and "nudge" features would be available. If there was no hold available, any part-illumination of BONUS would disappear at or before the start of the next game.

Where numbers appear on two or more reels on the win line, these are added and collectively contribute to the illumination.

In practice it is not intended to allow BONUS to be illuminated completely without any of the number spots as well. Thus for any number greater than 4, the full word would light up and the appropriate number of spots. This may happen simultaneously, or the lights might progress

through BONUS and then around the array of spots.

45 CLAIMS

1. A fruit machine of the kind described and having a 'nudge' feature, wherein there is a further occasionally enabled feature in which each reel can be altered in coarse fashion through more than one symbol position on operation of an associated adjustment element, this feature being occasionally available simultaneously with the 'nudge' feature whereby the reels can be coarsely adjusted and then 'nudged'.

2. A machine as claimed in claim 1, wherein there is a single coarse adjustment element whose operation causes all the reels to move.

3. A machine as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein each reel may move either forwards or backwards in such coarse adjustment.

4. A machine as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein during the coarse adjustment, any reel may move forwards and backwards.

5. A machine as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein when both features are available the player can choose to use either, or one in succession to the other.

6. A machine as claimed in claim 5, wherein the machine is inhibited from allowing coarse adjustment to follow nudging.

7. A machine as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein when either feature is available, there is a randomly determined gamble feature which, if used, can alter the amount of adjustment available.

8. A machine as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the number of coarse and/or nudge adjustments available is determined by the reel positions following a reel spin.

9. A fruit machine substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawing.